

[Human Kindness]

Mar. 16, 1939

Mrs. Mary Grover (white)

Gerogetown, N. C.

Dairy farmer

Anne [W.?] Stevens, writer

Douglas Carter, Reviser

[MILK AND HUMAN KINDNESS?]

By four o'clock in the morning, lights flicker through the windows of the Graham farmhouse. Sarah Graham calls to Dale, "Wake up, son, it's time to begin milking." Young Dale groans and turns over, but less than a half hour later his boots can be heard, tramp, tramp, on the stair. Frances, his slender, bright-haired, younger sister follows with a lighter tread. She has slipped on slacks and sweater, and puts on a fresh, white apron as she goes. Their flashlights illuminate the side grass plot and the red clay of the upward-sloping [road?]. [Out?] of the blackness emerges the stout figure of Ben, the hired helper. Doors and windows of the cattle stalls and of the bottling and refrigerating rooms show bright against the darkness. Cows stir and low sleepily as Ben washes their well-filled bags. There is the swish of milk in pails, tho click and gurgle of bottles being filled. Down the hill, smoke rises from the kitchen flue, as the sky gradually brightens. The work of the day has well begun.

By six o'clock the milk from 23 cows has been cooled and sealed by Frances in the bottles her mother boiled and sterilized the afternoon before. The milk of the previous afternoon,

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bottled and kept in the refrigerator, is also ready to be loaded on the truck. C9 - N.C. Box 1. 2

Dale and Frances turn toward the kitchen, whence come the odors of hot coffee and fried country sausage. Sarah places hot biscuit or corn bread and syrup on the table, and young Dale, ravenously hungry, consumes large quantities. Frances, careful of her slim figure, eats more daintily. Breakfast over, Dale takes his place at the driver's wheel, for Ben has the milk truck loaded, and starts out before seven o'clock on his morning rounds. By now the sunlight brightens the smoke from the kitchen flue and the bed of daffodils in the side yard. Frances waves him good luck, and his mother reminds him of some important errand in town.

As he drives up the hill toward the county road leading to the highways the house and barns disappear from sight in their own valley among the rounded, grassy, hill pastures. It will be midafternoon on his return from the town 15 miles away, where from door to door he delivers milk to his customers. At four-thirty p.m., the afternoon milking, sterilization of bottles, bottling, and refrigeration will begin afresh. As he approaches the farm, Dale's first view will be the two-story, rambling white farmhouse, its moss-green roof seeming to rise from a group of reddening maples, the whole set in a frame of grassy, dome-shaped hills, overhung by dark, pine-clad mountains.

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After Dale drives off in the truck at seven in the morning, Ben waters the cows, drives them to pasture, cleans out the stalls, and goes to work on the new, half-completed brick silo, or paints the new tin roofs of the weather-beaten barns and cow shed a bright green. Meanwhile, Sarah and Frances put the house in order, with the help of whichever of Sarah's married daughters may be visiting them at the time.

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"Some mornings I oversleep," Sarah told me when she gave me a recent interview. "Why, yesterday I didn't wake up until four-thirty in the morning." She had gone to bed at seven o'clock the evening before.

Sarah Graham, who is 59 years old, has "run" the dairy farm of 73 acres ever since her husband's death eight years ago. She looks more than her age, her round face being deeply seamed. Though her thoughts seem to move rapidly, her speech is husky, and halting, almost choked. "I have been a heart patient for 17 years," she explained cheerfully.

"After my husband's death, my older children helped me," she said, "but now they are all married and have homes and families of their own, all except Dale, who is just 21, and Frances, who is not yet of age. As soon as Dale establishes himself here, and gets married, I'm going to leave the farm, live in town, do as I wish, read a book, and rest. I think I've earned a rest."

Sarah's husband, Daniel, was born in England, she says, and came to this country when he was about 15 years old.

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Her neighbors say he was a German, which he might have been. Their 12 living children, four sons and eight daughters, are tall and blondly Saxon, with blue eyes and fair hair, while Sarah herself is short and dark. She was married to Daniel Graham at 14. He was some eight years older. She bore him 15 children, two of whom died in infancy. She also lost one grown daughter. Sarah does not approve of early marriages. "I told my daughters," she said, "I hoped none of them would marry before they were 18."

The Grahams, ever since Sarah's marriage, have been connected with dairies or dairy farming. Shortly after their marriage, her husband bought his stepfather's dairy in the suburbs of the county seat. He made no success of it. After he had resold it, he worked

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around numerous dairies and dairy farms as driver, milker, general helper, and finally as manager. Later he left the county to take the management of a large dairy farm at a State-owned sanitarium in the eastern part of the State. He and his family lived there for six years. In 1924 he returned to the county, and bought the farm now operated by his wife and youngest son.

Sarah, although she has lived the greater part of her life in the mountains, was born, she will tell you, "in the low country at [Woodward?] near Wilmington." Her father was a carpenter, but her grandparents were farmers.

"I used to visit my grandparents when I was a child," said Sarah, "and remember much that I saw there. When I took 5 charge of this farm eight years ago at my husband's death, I was helped by remembering how my grandfather did things. When we began planting, I remembered how my grandfather planted grain. As my boys got the ground ready, I followed them sowing rye as I had seen my grandfather do it. I didn't miss many swathes. After the field came up, the boys laughed at me and said the field looked like a checkerboard; but I didn't see them resowing it."

"When he had to cut up a hog," she continued, "I remembered how it was done on grandfather's farm. I had my sons take the hog, after it was killed and scalded, and hang it on that tree up there," pointing through the window, "and then I showed them how to cut it up.

"I didn't try to branch out on new projects when I took charge of the farm, but I made a living out of it for myself and the children, and paid up most of my husband's debts."

Sarah, along with other dairy farmers, lost much money by the coming of [Bang's?] disease among her cows. "Since State inspection began five years ago," she said, "I have had 60 cows condemned by the inspectors. The State paid me \$20 to \$25 apiece. It was hard to replace them. There were few cows left for sale in the county, and there was always danger of buying cows already infected, until the State took over inspection

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of private cattle. Many of the small farmers resented this State inspection. What they did with their 6 cattle, they thought, was their own affair. But it seems to me very important that cows be inspected. As all my children were raised on the bottle, I know the value of clean, wholesome milk." She added, "We had to buy where we could, so our herd is mixed, but Dale hopes in time to keep only Jerseys and Holsteins."

Sarah points out, too, that the matter of equipment bears heavily on the retail milk dealers. It costs, for instance, several hundred dollars to put in the apparatus for bottling milk. The bottles themselves are expensive, for each must be stamped with the farm-owner's name. It is not infrequent to have to buy \$75 worth of bottles at a time as they are broken or lost. The caps for the bottles must be stamped, too, with the name of the owner, and of course, while they are cheap, they must be bought in great quantities.

Sarah's refrigerating plant is costing her \$1,000. "I never would have gotten such an expensive one myself," she said. "A \$400 refrigerator would have been large enough for a farm of this size."

She went on to explain, "Two years ago I sold the farm to Dan [Benton?], a dairy farmer of some experience. He was to pay me \$15,000. For first payment, he swapped me a house, lot, and a few acres - his home. He valued it at \$3,000.

"He started out on too large a scale. He put in the \$1,000 refrigerating plant. He bought a new milk truck and a new pump, when the old ones would have done for several years. At the end of the year, he found he couldn't make it."

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Meanwhile, Mrs. Graham's son, Dale, could get no work. So she agreed to buy back the farm and install Dale there. By the terms of her agreement with Dan Benton, she was to give him back his home, and take over her farm with all its indebtedness. A neighbor of the Grahams, Mrs. Tarrant, whose husband owns a dairy farm, said to me, "Dan Benton

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certainly got the best of Mrs. Graham. She agreed to assume all the debts on the farm. Every day she learns of new ones.”

Mrs. Torrent said, also, “The reason Dan Benton put in so much new equipment was the inspectors bore down hard on him because he was just starting out for himself. They had been easy on Mrs. Graham, because she is a widow, and because she had been in charge of the farm for several years. So they made terms easier for her.”

“The new pump, truck, and refrigerator had all been bought on credit,” said Sarah Graham, “so Dale and I are paying for them.”

“But since Mr. Benton had not paid for them couldn't you have had them taken back?” I asked.

“Yes, but we needed the refrigeration, and by the time the equipment was torn out and cheaper machinery installed, it would have cost nearly as much.”

Consequently, the Grahams are planning to apply for a Federal loan of \$3,500. There is also a debt of \$1,600, borrowed from a land company in Raleigh during her husband's 8 life. If they get the Federal loan, Sarah estimates they can pay all indebtedness and have money left to buy two heifers. After all debts are paid, Sarah counts on Dale's clearing \$150 a month. She hopes to get her son to assume the responsibility of repaying the Federal loan. Mrs. Tarrant says dubiously, “He has never assumed responsibility so far.”

“I could,” said Sarah, “lend Dale the money myself.” She went on to explain that she owns three cottages in the county seat, bought with her husband's and dead daughter's life insurance. These have a market value of between \$6,000 and \$8,000. “By selling part of my town property, could raise enough to establish Dale, and let him pay me by degrees; but I think it's better to put the responsibility squarely on him.”

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Dale, when he can afford to do so, intends to install equipment for making concrete blocks, and so replace the wooden stalls and other frame buildings with concrete - ones like those on the neighboring dairy farm of Jim Tarrant and Tom Andrews.

The Grahams, like other dairy farmers in the neighborhood, pay the hired helper \$1 a day. The custom is to furnish this worker with a house, firewood, and all the milk he can use. Hours are from four-thirty a.m. until dark, seven days in the week, a part of Sunday excepted.

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"There is always something to be done on a farm," says Sarah. "A new-born calf has to be cared for; a sick cow has to be treated; the hogs have to be fed (we keep a few pigs to eat the slops); the stalls must be cleaned daily, except in winter when they are bedded in straw. Then the straw must be changed often. We try, too, to raise as much food for the stock as we can. Since our farming land is limited, we put it all into corn and lespedeza. We find it cheaper to buy food for the table than to raise it at the expense of corn or clover.

"With so much to be done, she observed, "I find it best to give each person his own tasks and hold him to them. Frances, for example, among other duties, attends to bottling the milk. I look after washing and sterilizing the bottles. I keep the easy jobs for myself," she laughed, "on account of this heart trouble. I've promised my married daughters not to over do. Even when my grandchildren come to see me, I give each his task. 'Everyone here,' I say, 'is busy! you'll be very lonely and lost if you have no work to do!' I did the same thing with my own children. I tried to make them all independent. Sometimes I think I made them too much so." She is a little worried, however, about Dale. "He depends on me too much," she says. "I am trying to lead him to face his own problems, and make his own decisions."

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The other sons have jobs and families of their own. Harry, the oldest, is foreman on a Federal building project in Virginia. "He makes \$75 a week," she says proudly. "He never

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finished high school; so he found it hard at first to read the blue prints. But his wife is well educated. Her father teaches school. So she taught Harry what he needed to know to do his work.”

Jim, another son, works in an automobile tire retreading business in town at \$20 a week. He and his family live in a neat white cottage not far from his mother's farm. Edmund lives in town and makes \$20 a week working in a news company. Two of Mrs. Graham's daughters were educated in a State college for teachers. One taught for several years before her marriage. “She still is teaching,” Sarah says: “her own children in her own home.” The other college graduate could get no school position, but she, too, is married and is using her training on her own children. The chief recreations of the family seem to be going to church services on Sunday and to the [B.Y.P.U.?], but Sarah considers the movies clean and educational, and encourages her children to go to them, and to go to a drug store for refreshments afterward.

The farmhouse, though old-fashioned, seems quite comfortable. A grassy lawn, fringed in March with yellow wands of forsythia, leads to a deep front piazza. The parlor occupies the front of the house. Its red carpet, green-cushioned 11 wicker furniture, and large-figured lack curtains are protected from the light in true mid-Victorian fashion by drawn shades. It has an open fireplace and a few pictures. A double door connects it with the living room, which is well-lighted and is heated by an immense coal heater. The living-room furniture is simple but comfortable, and the room has a cozy appearance. A child's white iron crib with immaculate white bedding and pale blue blankets was rolled near the heater. In it, a plump, blond baby sucked contentedly at the bottle, which its fair-haired mother, a visiting daughter of the home, held for it.

Sarah Graham, seated in a comfortable rocker, was resting from her morning's tasks. She expressed herself as well satisfied. “I feel,” she said, “that I have fulfilled my obligations to the race. I feel, also, that my present occupation is useful and honorable. I am helping

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to build up strong, healthy bodies in other women's homes. All I want now is to see Dale established on the farm. Then I want to rest.”